

Publication Trends in E-book Research: A Web of Science-Based Bibliometric Analysis (2017–2025)

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Abstract: *This study examines the global scientific outputs of e-book research by analysing data on literature indexed by the Web of Science database for the years 2017 and 2025. The data are analysed based on parameters such as the document types, language, publication output, citations, collaborations, journals, prolific authors, productive countries, and most frequently appearing top words/phrases in the title of the articles. The literature on e-books is gradually declining. The USA and China were the most productive countries. The Journal of Academic Librarianship was the most productive journal, having published 28 articles on e-books, followed by the Journal of Librarianship and Information Science (20) and College & Research Libraries (13). Zhang, Mei of Simmons University, United States, was the most productive author of e-book research. As depicted by the word/phrase analysis, the researchers were keen on investigating the impact, usage behaviour, and models of e-books.*

Keywords: Web of Science, Bibliometric Analysis, Research Productivity, Citations, e-books.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic books (e-books) have emerged as an essential resource of modern libraries and a preferred mode of publication for scholarly communication. E-books have gained popularity for both leisure and academic content, but there are numerous perspectives on the recent e-book movement. Users are now comparing and contrasting their e-books access options and reader preferences. How and why they choose one access format over another varies considerably from user to user.

Merriam-Webster (2026) defines an e-book as a book composed in or converted to a digital format for display on a computer screen or handheld device. According to Gardiner and Musto (2010), some authors believe that “the definition of e-book is a work in progress”. Although the concept of e-books is not novel, significant confusion persists regarding their nature, even at the fundamental level of definition (Tedd 2005).

Bennett (2006) states that currently, no universally accepted definition exists, and the term has been implemented inconsistently across the literature. Addressing these definitional ambiguities, the report ‘Promoting the uptake of e-books in higher and further education’ identifies the lack of a clear definition as ‘a source of confusion and therefore a barrier to uptake’ within academic publishing contexts (Gold Leaf, 2003).

Armstrong et al. (2002) offer a widely accepted definition: “any piece of electronic text regardless of size or composition (a digital object), but excluding journal publications, made available electronically (or optically) for any device (handheld or desk-bound) that includes a screen”. In 2003, the “International Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science” refined its e-book definition, maintaining the book-analogy approach: “the result of integrating classical book structure, or rather the familiar concept of a book, with features that can be provided within an electronic environment is referred to as an electronic book (or e-book), which is intended as an interactive document that can be composed and read on a computer” (Landoni, 2003).

The development of e-books can be attributed to early digital text projects, such as Project Gutenberg launched in 1971 by Michael Hart, which provided free access to public domain books in electronic form (Hart, 1992).

Rao (2005) boldly stated that the e-book is the most important development in the literature after Gutenberg. As the Internet and the World Wide Web developed in the 1990s, the idea of creating and sharing information grew exponentially. This opened the doors to self-publishing. E-book awareness became more prevalent in 1998, when early versions of e-reader devices were developed, including Rocket and Soft Book readers. net Library launched its Internet-based e-book service for libraries in 1999, and Google Books was formally released in 2004. The sales of these early handheld devices and e-book collections prompted the publishing industry to take e-books more seriously. Amazon released the first version of the Kindle in 2007 which offered nearly 90,000 e-book titles. Barnes and Noble, Sony, and other companies have followed Amazon with their own handheld e-book readers. In 2010, Apple released an iPad multipurpose tablet computer with e-books available from the iBook store. Although not a dedicated e-book reader, this device and the popular “apps” and e-book collections have generated tremendous excitement by signalling the age of the multiuse mobile device.

E-books are valued for their 24/7 access, full-text searchability, and ability to support multiple simultaneous users, which aligns with the needs of users. “A number of new publishers or aggregators have come to the fore in the past few years, or existing publishers have extended their products to include web-based e-books, particularly in the scientific disciplines” (McLuckie, 2005). E-books have revolutionised access speed, transforming what once took weeks through interlibrary loans or special orders into instant, authenticated, and permanent downloads ready for annotation. This shift transcended mere convenience and ensured continuity. Collections have expanded without physical shelves, enabling libraries to serve their communities seamlessly without geographical limitations (Paradijs, 2026).

Singh and Kumar (2025) highlighted numerous challenges associated with the adoption of e-books concerning “network difficulties, DRM restrictions, lack of a standard e-book format, poor adaptation to screen reading, eye strain, etc.” The findings of studies on user format preferences depict consistent growth in the adoption of e-books.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A bibliometric study offers an objective and reliable analysis of the vast influx of new information and conceptual advancements. Bibliometrics has proven beneficial by delivering a structured examination of extensive data, enabling the inference of temporal trends, identification of research themes, detection of shifts in disciplinary boundaries, recognition of the most prolific scholars and institutions, and presentation of the overarching landscape of existing research. (Crane, 1972). A comprehensive study and quantitative perspective of a certain research issue backed by a substantial body of literature data can be obtained through bibliometric analysis. Specifically, they can be used to examine the trajectory of development and evolution within a scientific area, identify hotspots and new ideas in a field, and assess the effectiveness and impact of various nations or publications (Kolle et al.,

2017). Therefore, the results of bibliometric analysis can be used to better comprehend current trends and identify future research initiatives.

Bibliometric analysis methodologies have been extensively employed to uncover research trends in a given subject. Börner et al. (2003) advanced large-scale science mapping approaches, demonstrating the integration of visualisation techniques and knowledge domain mapping within bibliometric research. Bibliometric analysis methods are also popular in the field of Library and Information Science. Donthu et al. (2021) provide one of the most prevalent cited methodological frameworks for conducting bibliometric analyses. Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) introduced the bibliometric R-package, which has become a core analytical tool for bibliometric studies in LIS. Some of the recent topics covered under bibliometric studies of the LIS domain are altimetric and library science open-access publishing, data science research, library science literature, AI in libraries, library and information science, and information systems literature.

Ramaiah (2005) prepared a bibliography of literature on e-books and produced a more exhaustive list covering publications until the end of 2011. He commented “The electronic book (e-book) is one of several forms of e-publications, and its popularity has been increasing steadily for the past decade.” Kolle, et al. (2018) conducted a study to analyse the global scientific outputs on e-book research. during 2001-2016 using Scopus database and reported that “literature on e-books has grown exponentially and e-books was one of the hot topics of the research in recent decade. Martín-Martín et al. (2018) performed comparative evaluations of major citation databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, which significantly influenced research assessment practices in LIS.

This study used the WoS database to perform a bibliometric analysis of e-book publications. To identify trends in e-book research, factors such as document type, citation, preference, prolific writers, contributing countries, collaboration, and the most commonly used terms or phrases in article titles were also examined.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were sourced from the Web of Science database. Web of Science is a bibliographic database which indexes more than 34000 journals. It covers journals belonging to various indexes, that is, “Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Index Chemicus, Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Science (CPCI-S), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)”. Following keywords are used: “e-book”, “eBook”, “electronic book” and “online book” in title or keyword or abstract with publication period covering 2017 to 2025. We further restricted our search limit to specific Web of Science subject category of “Information Science Library Science.” A total of 370 documents were retrieved from the search method, including 323 research articles. As our purpose was to see the trends in research on e-books, we only considered research articles for analysis. Article (323) information such as title, authors, journal, year, citations, and affiliation addresses were exported in a plain text file format. The Bibliometrix R-package Biblioshiny

(v 4.4.1) was used to analyse the data. This tool is extensively utilised for bibliometric analysis and offers a comprehensive array of functions for data processing.

RESULTS

Table 1: Document Type Distribution

Type of documents	No. of documents	%of 370
Articles	323	87.29
Review Article	12	3.24
Book Review	11	2.97
News Item	10	2.7
Editorial Material	8	2.16
Proceeding Paper	6	1.62

In total, there were six types of documents. Among these document types, there were 323 articles, followed by 12 review articles, 11 book reviews, and 10 news items. Eight editorial materials and six proceedings papers were included in the 370 documents. It is apparent that the e-book is the trending topic featured in research articles.

Publication output and scientific descriptors

The year-wise distribution, percentage, mean total citations per article, and mean total citations per year of the 323 research articles are presented in Table 2 on e-books for the period of 2017 to 2025. The highest number of articles (51) was published in 2017. A total of 40–45 articles were published between 2018–2020. By 2021, the total number of publications dipped to 25 and increased to 46 by 2022. 2023 was the least productive year with only 18 articles, followed by 34 articles in 2024 and 24 articles in 2025. An average of 35 articles were published on the e-books each year.

Table 2: Characteristics of Articles in WoS on e-books Literature from 2017 to 2025

PY	TA	(%)	TC	MTCPA	MTCPY
2017	51	15.78	605	11.86	1.32
2018	40	12.38	455	11.38	1.42
2019	45	13.93	484	10.76	1.54
2020	40	12.38	347	8.68	1.45
2021	25	7.73	237	9.48	1.9
2022	46	14.24	283	6.15	1.54
2023	18	5.57	84	4.67	1.56
2024	34	10.52	101	2.97	1.49
2025	24	7.43	49	2.04	2.04

Note: TA; total articles, %; per cent of 323 articles, TC; total citations, MTCPA; Mean total citations per article, MTCPY; mean total citation per year

Mean total citations per year of articles and mean total citations per year were also calculated. Articles published in 2017 received 605 citations which is the highest, followed by 484 citations in 2019 and 455 citations in 2018. 2025 was the second least productive year in terms of articles, but it received the lowest number of citations (49).

Journals

A total of 323 articles were published by the 66 sources with an average of 4.89 articles per journal. The

top nine journals with 10 or more articles on e-books in the period–2017–2025 are displayed in Table 3.

Of the nine journals, only six recorded the impact factor as per the Journal Citation Report, 2024. The journals possessing an impact factor were *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (2.23), *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (2.1), *Journal of Documentation* (2.0), *Electronic Library* (1.5), *College & Research Libraries* (1.4), and *Library Resources & Technical Services* (1.0). The *Journal of Academic Librarianship* has the highest journal impact factor of 2.23, and it was the most prolific journal, which has published 28 articles on e-books, followed by the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (20) and *College & Research Libraries* (13).

These are indicators of the impact of research in a subject field; however, they cannot be seen as an impact, and they can be regarded as markers of the search.

Table3: Most Productive Journals on e-books with 10 or More Articles

Journal	TA	(%)	JIF 2024	TC	CPP
Journal of Academic Librarianship	28	8.66	2.3	225	8.03
Journal of Librarianship and Information Science	20	6.19	2.1	163	8.15
College & Research Libraries	13	2.21	1.4	164	12.61
Electronic Library	12	4.02	1.5	84	7
Information Research - International Electronic Journal	12	4.02	N/A	39	3.25
Library Hi Tech	11	3.4	N/A	129	11.72
Journal of Documentation	10	3.09	2	74	7.4
Library Resources & Technical Services	10	3.09	1	48	4.8
Serials Review	10	3.09	N/A	16	1.6

Note: TA; total articles, %; per cent of 323 articles, IF2014; Impact factor as per Journal Citation Report 2024, TC; total citations, CPP; average citations per article, N/A; Not available

The articles published in the College & Research Libraries were most recognised, as they have higher citations per article (CPP = 12.61), followed by the Library Hi Tech (CPP = 11.72), Journal of Librarianship and Information Science (CPP = 8.15), and Journal of Academic Librarianship (CPP = 8.03).

Prolific authors

We have analysed the research contributions of authors on e-books for the period–2017–2025 (Table 4). Authorship base contribution. A total of 802 unique authors contributed to the e-book research with an average of 0.40 authors per article. Out of 323 articles, 70 were found to be single authors; authors with three or more articles were considered for the analysis, and Zhang Mei of *Simmons University, United States*, was the most prolific author of one-book research with five articles. Sanchez-Munoz, Elena from *University of Salamanca, Spain*, Thehwall, Mike from *University of Wolverhampton, UK* and Chiu, Dickson K. W. from *University of Hong Kong, PRC* has four articles each on e-books. Other authors who have

published three articles on e-books are *Christian, Lisa* (University of Tennessee, United States); *Fry, Amy* (Bowling Green State University, United States); *Giblin, Rebecca* (University of Melbourne, Australia); *Gil-Leiva, Isidoro* (University of Murcia, Spain); *Gudinavicius, Arunas* (Vilnius University, Lithuania); and *Kohn, Karen* (Temple University, United States).

Table4: Prolific Authors with Three or More Articles

Author	TA	(%)	Institute
Zhang, Mei	5	1.54	Simmons University, United States
Sanchez-Munoz, Elena	4	1.23	University of Salamanca, Spain
Thelwall, Mike	4	1.23	University of Wolverhampton, UK
Chiu, Dickson K. W.	4	1.23	University of Hong Kong, PRC
Christian, Lisa	3	0.92	University of Tennessee, United States
Fry, Amy	3	0.92	Bowling Green State University, United States
Giblin, Rebecca	3	0.92	University of Melbourne, Australia
Gil-Leiva, Isidoro	3	0.92	University of Murcia, Spain
Gudinavicius, Arunas	3	0.92	Vilnius University, Lithuania
Kohn, Karen	3	0.92	Temple University, United States

Note: TA; total articles, %; per cent of 322 articles

Authors from the United States and China had the highest number of collaborations, with a total of 11 articles published by them, followed by the United States and Korea, with five articles. Authors from China-Korea, Spain-Brazil, and the United States-Finland have collaborated and produced three articles on e-book research.

Table 5: Top Five Collaborating Countries

Country	Country	TA
United States	China	11
United States	Korea	5
China	Korea	3
Spain	Brazil	3
USA	Finland	3

Note:TA; total articles

Word/phrase analysis

The top ten most frequently appearing words/phrases from the titles of the articles are presented in Table 6. The word "Impact" was the most common, appearing in the title of 31 articles, followed by behaviour (22) and model (21). Other pertinent words appearing in the title of the articles are usage (19), information (18), university (16), adoption (15), academic libraries (13), and perceptions (12).



Figure 1: Word/Phrases in Title of the Articles

Based on the overall analysis of the words or phrases in the titles of the articles, it can be noted that e-book usage and its impact is the main theme of the articles featured in the topics of the research on e-books.

Table 6:Top 10 Most Frequently Appeared Words/Phrases in Title of the Articles

Word/phrases in title	Occurrences
Impact	31
Behaviour	23
Model	22
Students	21
Usage	19
Information	18
University	16
Adoption	15
Academic Libraries	13
Perceptions	12

DISCUSSION

The results show that e-book research has remained active but uneven, with a concentration in a few leading journals, authors, and countries, which is consistent with earlier bibliometric work that identified e-books as a growing interdisciplinary topic. E-book research appears to be driven mainly by issues of usage, adoption, behaviour, impact, and academic library applications, which aligns with the literature review and confirms that user-centred concerns continue to shape the field.

The dominance of journals such as the Journal of Academic Librarianship and the Journal of Librarianship and Information Science suggests that the topic is especially relevant to library and information science scholarships and professional practice. The higher productivity of the USA and China indicates that research capacity and international collaboration strongly influence publication output in this domain.

The citation pattern also implies that earlier publications established the conceptual base of the field, whereas more recent studies are expanding into newer user and access issues. These findings matter because they show that e-book research is no longer limited to format adoption but is increasingly linked to digital access, academic support, and scholarly communication needs. At the same time, the study is limited by its reliance on the Web of Science and by restricting analysis to the Information Science and Library Science category, which may exclude relevant work from education, computing, or publishing studies.

Further research should compare Web of Science with Scopus and other databases, include broader subject categories, and examine collaboration networks, thematic evolution, and citation impacts over a longer period. Future studies could use qualitative content analysis to understand how e-book use changes across user groups, institutions, and regions. Overall, the findings confirm that e-books remain an important and evolving research area with clear implications for digital library strategy, collection development, and user-centred service design.

CONCLUSION

A total of 323 articles were published on the e-books during the study period, with an average of 35 articles per year. A decline in articles from the year 2020 on the topic was observed. The majority of the articles were contributed by multiple authors, and most of the articles appeared in the Journal of Academic Librarianship and the Journal of Librarianship and Information Science. The USA and China were the most contributing countries, accounting for 49 percent of the literature. Zhang Mei was the most productive author in e-book research and was affiliated with Simmons University, United States. Researchers have been keen on investigating the impact of e-books, user behaviour, models of e-books, and so on.

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